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Somalia: Prospects for Stability

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An Intelligence Assessment

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Somalia: Prospects for Stability

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An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 23 February 1982
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This assessment was prepared by [redacted]
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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, West-East Division, ALA, on
[redacted]

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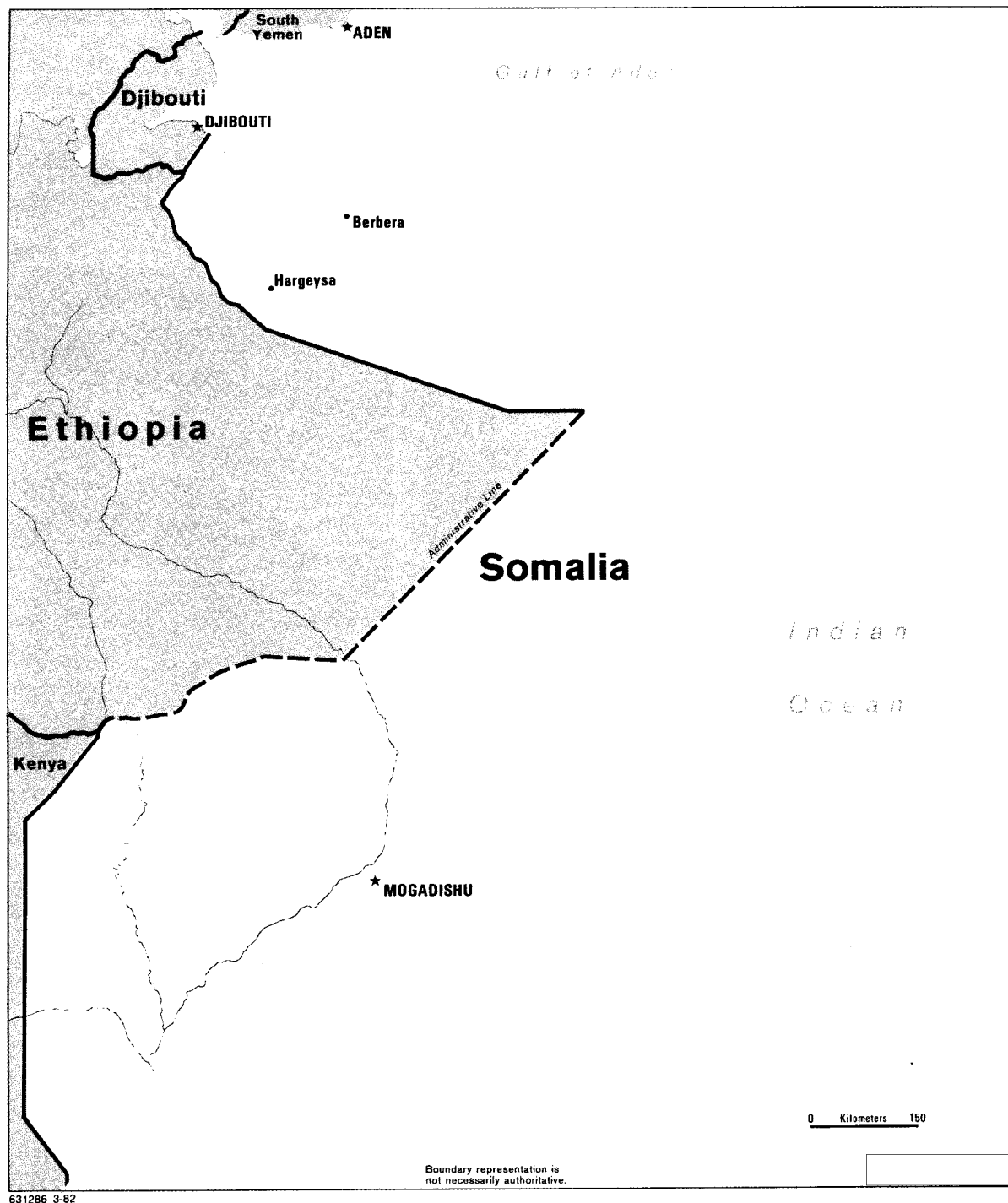
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**Somalia: Prospects
for Stability**

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Key Judgments

President Siad of Somalia is likely this year to face a serious challenge either from a disaffected military or from within his own ruling junta. His political position has been weakened considerably over the past two years by economic, military, tribal, and political problems.

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The Somali economy has posed particular problems over the past few years. Most recently, the situation has been aggravated by damaging weather, the influx of nearly a million refugees from Ethiopia, higher oil prices caused by Somalia's loss of its regular Iraqi supplies in 1980, and inflation. These factors have combined to generate heightened internal unrest.

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The military is in disarray, with most units understrength, inventories of military equipment low, and serious morale problems. Military leaders have been repeatedly humiliated by their inability to repulse sporadic Ethiopian ground incursions and air attacks. Ethiopian-sponsored insurgents, aided by Libya, present Siad with escalating guerrilla and terrorist threats.

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Somalia has had little success obtaining foreign military aid. Siad's failure to attract greater US assistance is eroding his position among the Army's leaders, who increasingly see him as contributing to Somalia's problems.

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Government leaders have been urging Siad to address these problems. Siad, however, is responding to these difficulties with increasing rigidity and appears to believe that he can protect his position by again resorting to cosmetic political maneuvers and by persuading Washington to extend substantial new military and economic aid. The Somali President hopes he can convince the United States to rely heavily on Somalia in its strategic planning, thus committing Washington to his personal survival.

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Somalia's problems almost certainly are too deep seated to be resolved without more decisive moves, despite Siad's considerable and well-tested political skills. Even if he manages to survive his current difficulties, Siad will be unlikely to regain the political strength he once enjoyed, and he will be repeatedly subjected to political challenges. The depth of Somalia's problems virtually ensures that any successor regime would also have grave problems establishing a stable political system. [REDACTED]

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In the event of a coup from within the ruling junta, Siad's successor would probably continue Mogadishu's pro-Western policies in the near term. Over time, however, the new regime might seek a rapprochement with Moscow if Siad's removal failed to bring increased Western aid. A turn away from the United States could come more quickly if Siad were overthrown by younger, radical officers. [REDACTED]

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The Soviets tried to establish close relations with both Ethiopia and Somalia in the mid-1970s. In the event of an ouster of Siad, whom Moscow blames for the 1977 breakdown of the Soviet-Somali alliance, the Soviets may again offer economic and military assistance to reestablish close ties despite the longstanding hostility between Mogadishu and Addis Ababa. [REDACTED]

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Somalia: Prospects for Stability

President Mohammed Siad Barre of Somalia enters 1982 having maintained political power for a dozen years by facing an unprecedented array of challenges. War, drought, and financial upheaval have further weakened Somalia economically and militarily and Siad's options for dealing with these problems all carry significant domestic political risks. Even his closest supporters have begun to assign Siad personal responsibility for the country's problems.

Siad hopes to establish and benefit from increasingly close ties to the United States, based on his movement toward the West in recent years and Somalia's strategic position near the Persian Gulf. Heightened superpower interest in the region also has carried risks for Somalia, however, primarily by prompting radical states such as Ethiopia and Libya to work together for his overthrow.

Economic Woes

Somalia's pastoral and subsistence agricultural economy has been battered in recent years. Livestock production, the nation's main source of export earnings, has picked up since the drought of the mid-1970s but may be hitting a new plateau. Government pricing policies, poor management, and the weather have sharply decreased the production of bananas, Somalia's other major export. The drought ended in early 1981 with heavy flooding along Somalia's two rivers, resulting in further agricultural losses.

Since the loss in late 1980 of Somalia's regular oil supplier, Iraq, because of the Iran-Iraq war, Somalia has had to rely on the more expensive spot market for energy supplies. As a result, Somalia has all but exhausted its remaining foreign exchange reserves and has experienced periodic fuel shortages. Although Mogadishu contracted late last year for regular imports from Saudi Arabia, a number of disputes, apparently over bribes to Somali officials, so far have prevented shipments.



President Mohammed Siad Barre

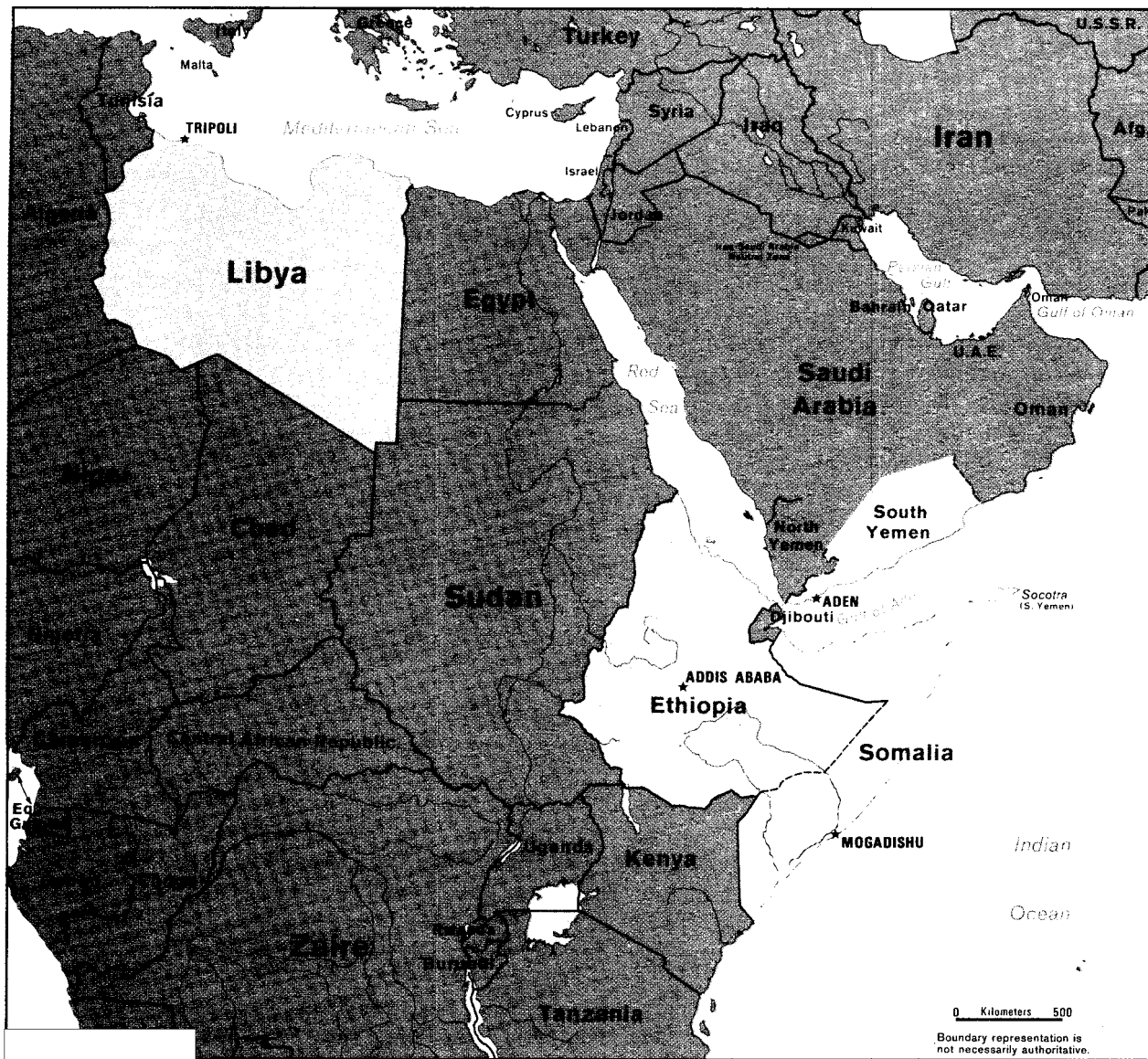
The annual rate of inflation, although declining, is about 45 percent, creating discontent among Somalis on fixed government and military salaries. Government efforts to cap inflation by outlawing price increases have produced shortages of staple items except in the flourishing black market.

The country's trade and infant industry have been crippled by pervasive corruption and by the ineptitude of the state corporations set up by Somalia's "socialist" government. Many of the centralized economy's managers are appointed for political reasons rather than on the basis of ability.

Finally, the vast influx of refugees into Somalia from Ethiopia during 1980 and 1981, which has now ended, swelled the nation's population by nearly a million, that is, by approximately one-fourth. Although the 600,000 refugees remaining in camps now are largely supported by international relief aid, the administration of the camps is a continuing strain on government resources.

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Military Disarray

The Somali Army has never recovered from its defeat in the 1977-78 Ogaden war. Military equipment inventories have been severely depleted by combat losses, the withdrawal of troops from Ethiopia in 1978, and shoddy maintenance. Most units are under-strength and suffer from severe morale problems brought on by disorganization, tribal tensions, failure of military pay to keep pace with inflation, and the strain of a constant alert status. Some soldiers have turned to banditry to supplement their incomes. Relatively minor complaints, such as disputes over promotions, have sparked isolated riots and mutinies. Disturbances have been contained so far, but given the mood of the military, spontaneous outbreaks could easily escalate into a general military revolt. [REDACTED]

Somalia's military situation has been made worse by Mogadishu's limited success in attracting foreign military aid. Somalia has not yet received any US military equipment under the agreement signed in 1980 that provides for US access to Somali military facilities. China, Egypt, and Italy, Somalia's major arms suppliers, have cut off further shipments until Mogadishu begins paying its outstanding debt.¹ With its limited foreign exchange reserves, however, Somalia is unable to meet this condition. [REDACTED]

Military leaders have been humiliated by their inability to challenge or respond to occasional Ethiopian air attacks on border settlements, wide-ranging overflights of Somali territory, and guerrilla incursions by the Ethiopian- and Libyan-supported Somali Democratic Salvation Front (SDSF). The lack of military preparations by Ethiopian forces in the border region makes it clear that the Ethiopians have decided for the present to avoid a direct confrontation with Somalia's inferior forces. The insurgent Front, however, is accelerating its effort to overthrow the Siad regime. [REDACTED]

Externally Supported Subversion

The substantial resources being invested in the Front by Ethiopia and Libya indicate that they are using the SDSF as their principal vehicle to bring down the

Siad regime, a major target of the Aden Pact signed last year by Ethiopia, Libya, and South Yemen. Addis Ababa holds Siad personally responsible for launching the devastating Ogaden invasion in 1977, and appears convinced that he is vulnerable to guerrilla subversion. To carry out this effort, the Ethiopians have helped organize, equip, train, and direct the SDSF's approximately 3,000 combatants. [REDACTED]

The Front's activities in Somalia generally have been limited to attacks on isolated targets, ambushes, terrorist bombings, and mining of rural roads and bridges. Its effectiveness has been undercut by its limited public appeal. The Front draws virtually all its membership from the Majertain, one of Somalia's many clans.² The Majertain dominated Somalia's Government during the 1960s and resent their loss of power in Siad's 1969 coup. The Front is generally seen as the vehicle for the political ambitions of the Majertain rather than a national movement and is stigmatized by its close association with the Ethiopian enemy [REDACTED]

The Front probably cannot overthrow the Siad regime on its own, but by the end of 1981 there were signs that Libyan aid and training were taking effect.

[REDACTED] the Front has slowly increased its activity and the insurgents have begun using more sophisticated weapons, including armored personnel carriers. The SDSF also has been carrying out more numerous and larger attacks without the direct support of Ethiopian troops. [REDACTED]

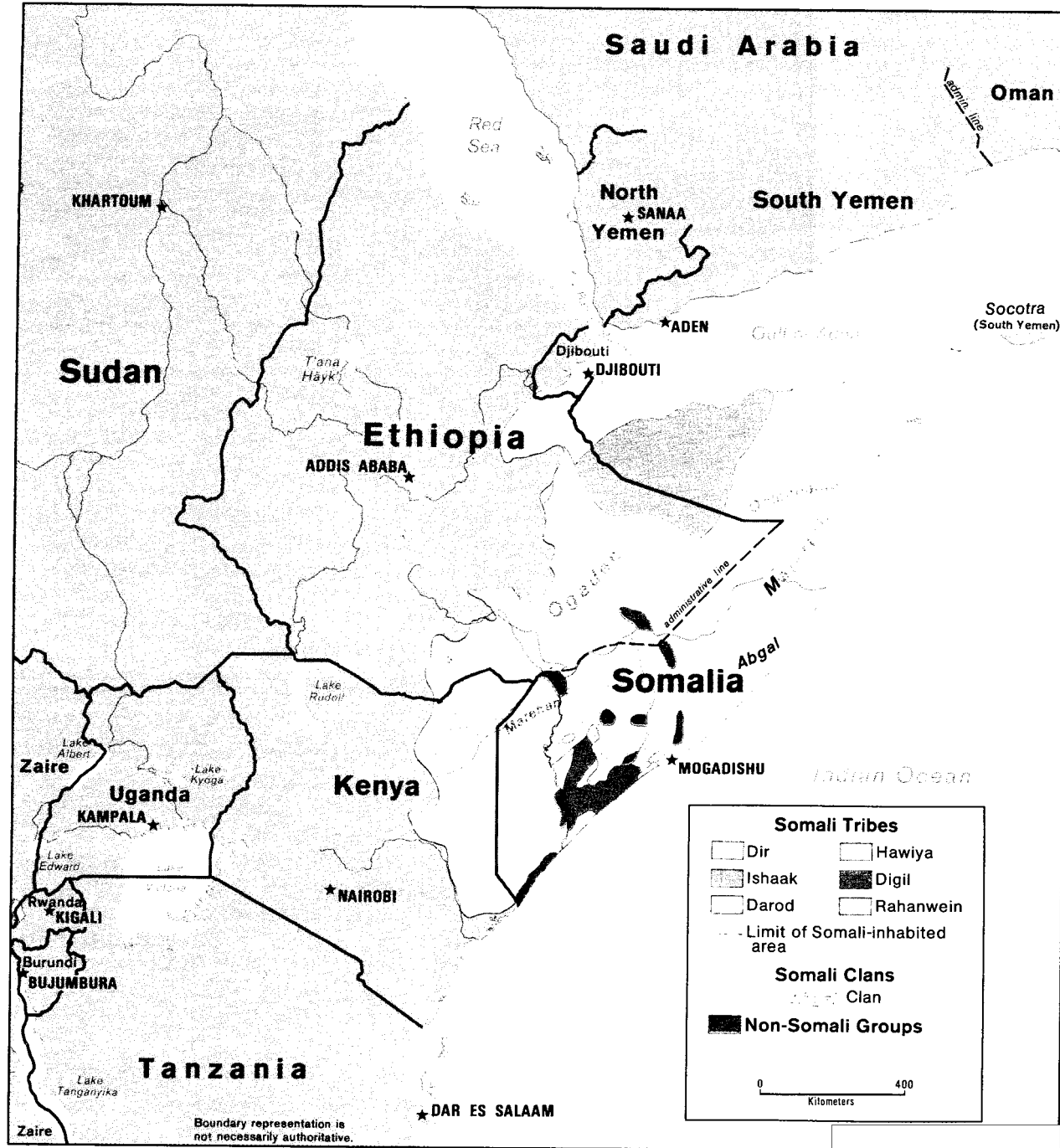
[REDACTED] the Soviets maintain close ties to political activists in the SDSF and for a time last year provided the Front with

² Somalia, unlike most African states, is inhabited primarily by one culturally and ethnically unified people, but the Somalis are divided into numerous tribes, clans, subclans, and smaller family groups. Somali politics are characterized by frequent clashes and shifting alliances among these groups. [REDACTED]

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Tribes and Major Clans of the Somali Nation



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a small number of advisers. Moscow, however, is reluctant to become directly identified with the SDSF, and for this reason favors efforts by Ethiopia and Libya to aid the Front. Partly for this reason, Moscow apparently encouraged the formation of the Aden Pact. [REDACTED]

Increasing Tribal Tensions

Siad has long been adept at balancing the interests of Somalia's numerous antagonistic tribal groups to maintain his position. This has encouraged the widespread belief within Somalia that only Siad enjoys sufficiently broad respect to keep peace among the clans and ensure national unity. [REDACTED]

During the past year, however, this balancing act has become more difficult as tensions between clans have slowly increased. The influx of nearly a million refugees from Ethiopia, scarcity of goods, and corruption have intensified the normal level of tribal animosity. As Somalia's mounting problems increasingly come to be blamed on Siad's leadership, the Somali President has found it more difficult to preserve the mosaic of clans supporting his rule. In some instances, clans have attempted to extract concessions from the weakened President by threatening to associate or negotiate with dissident movements. [REDACTED]

In recent years, Siad has come to rely more and more on his own Marehan clan to support his regime. The elite presidential guard is composed almost entirely of members of this clan, and Marehans within the Army report directly to Siad on political dissension. They also receive a disproportionate number of government and government-controlled jobs. Discontent with Marehan domination has been particularly severe in the north, where violent protests over the harsh rule of the Marehan military governor resulted in widespread arrests in early 1982. [REDACTED]

Siad might even be losing support among the Marehan, who probably are troubled by the depth of feeling being generated against them among the other clans. The clan's elders, however, want to maintain the privileged position of their group and are thus unlikely to oppose Siad actively unless another acceptable Marehan leader were available. [REDACTED]

Discontent Within the Regime

Since Siad came to power in a military coup in 1969, he has concentrated authority in his own office and now runs the Somali Government on his own, accepting only limited advice from even his closest aides. Although other members of the junta resent this concentration of power, disputes and jealousies among them, accentuated by Siad's clever political maneuvering and his self-serving reputation for indispensability, have prevented any effective opposition from within the ruling group. Siad also has confounded his critics in the junta through frequent and dramatic acts such as cabinet reshuffles and his declaration of a "state of emergency" in 1980 which still remains in force. Siad apparently believes he can continue to use such tactics to keep potential challengers off balance. [REDACTED]

During the past year, the Supreme Revolutionary Council (the latest incarnation of the ruling junta) has used its infrequent meetings to blame Siad for Somalia's troubles and to call on him either to step down from the presidency or to share more of his authority with council members. [REDACTED]

Siad's Response to His Problems

Publicly, he has blamed Somalia's economic difficulties on the cost of meeting the Ethiopian military threat, which is only partially true, while privately censuring other members of the Council for alleged corruption and incompetence. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

In early February Siad released a number of prominent political prisoners, including former Prime Minister Egal, a northerner overthrown in the 1969 coup, in a gesture partially aimed at tribal reconciliation.

[REDACTED]

Siad appears to have no intention of accepting suggestions from government leaders that he also break up the inefficient state corporations, decentralize and liberalize the economy, and attack pervasive corruption in an effort to bolster investor confidence in Somalia. The liberal dispensation of patronage provided by the centralized system, particularly to Siad's Marehan kinsmen, provides an important component of his power base. Siad reasons that it would be extremely risky to give up these immediate political benefits in exchange for the long-term and indefinite hope of general economic revival. [REDACTED]

Siad, instead, has tried to pacify his critics by promising a bonanza of military and economic aid from the United States to bail out the country. Nonetheless, disappointment among the ruling elite about the limited nature of Washington's aid commitment to Somalia is already becoming evident. [REDACTED]

Siad apparently hopes that Somalia will become more important for Washington's defense planning in the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf region and that greater US aid commitments will materialize as a result. To encourage this, Siad is eager to become identified as closely as possible with the United States, despite the resultant criticism and active opposition he can expect from neighboring radical states. The Somali President's efforts included pushing for a personal meeting with President Reagan—which is currently scheduled for mid-March—and broad hints to US officials that he would be willing to allow the establishment of a US military base in Somalia. The release in early February of former Prime Minister Egal, whose condition was the object of repeated inquiries from Washington, was partially designed to boost Siad's credit in the United States. [REDACTED]

Siad's Options

Somalia's economy will continue to suffer from uncertain weather and changes in international trade patterns. Moreover, there are limits on the extent to which government measures can alleviate Somalia's economic problems, and most potentially effective steps would carry political costs for Siad. The rapid decentralization and liberalization of the Somali economy, for example, would deprive Siad of leverage provided by patronage jobs for his supporters and fellow Marehans and would boost unemployment. Thus, while such a campaign could alleviate resentment among non-Marehan Somalis toward corrupt Marehan officeholders, it also would weaken Siad's hold on the loyalty of his own clan. [REDACTED]

In view of the near collapse of the Somali military since its withdrawal from the Ogaden in 1980, Mogadishu realizes that it must make a major effort to reorganize and reequip the Army. The Somalis have already begun this task, with Acting Defense Minister Omar Haji attempting to root out corruption and instill discipline in the officer corps. Such an effort, however, risks alienating important segments of the military, including those who owe their assignments to clan favoritism and who profit by corruption. [REDACTED]

Somalia's need to rearm its military also presents Siad with costly political choices. Potential Western benefactors are reluctant to provide military aid as long as Somalia harbors irredentist ambitions against all its neighbors. Siad clearly recognizes this problem, and has tried to patch up the dispute with neighboring Kenya, which also has an access agreement with the United States and is generally friendly to the West. In recognition of his inferior military position, Siad also is trying to gain a temporary respite in the dispute with Ethiopia by reducing aid to guerrillas operating in that country's Ogaden region. Nevertheless, Siad probably hopes, in the long run, to rearm Somalia sufficiently to challenge Ethiopia once again. [REDACTED]

After Siad

The men around Siad who would most likely take his place in the event of a "palace revolt" are all pragmatists whose inclination would be to continue Somalia's present foreign policies at least for the short term.

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Whoever replaces Siad will find it difficult to depart from Somalia's present foreign policies. Past governments in Mogadishu have occasionally deemphasized the struggle to "regain" the Ogaden, as Siad appears to be doing now, but the depth of feeling on this issue makes it virtually impossible for these claims to be abandoned completely. The resulting hostility toward Ethiopia lessens the chance of a rapprochement with Addis Ababa's Soviet patrons [redacted]

Nonetheless, the Soviets almost certainly would renew efforts to establish close ties with both Mogadishu and Addis Ababa in a post-Siad period. The receptivity of Siad's successors to a rapprochement with the Soviet Union would depend, in part, on the results of their attempts to obtain military assistance from the West. At present, most Somali military officers appear to support the idea of looking to Washington for help. The continued failure of large-scale US aid to materialize will, however, generate doubts in Mogadishu concerning the utility of the United States as a diplomatic and military partner. Although many in the Army are inclined to blame Siad for delays in arms transfers, a successor government would be conscious of the part that such delays played in Siad's downfall and probably would be impatient in its own dealings with Washington. [redacted]

While the initial tendencies of Siad's successors probably would be pro-Western, their probable pragmatism and sense of desperation about Somalia's economic and military problems could lead them within a short time to explore other options for assistance. Siad's successors might reason that a rapprochement with Moscow would result in a major military supply relationship, similar to the one that existed during the period of close Somali-Soviet ties in the early 1970s. They also might reason that renewed cooperation with the Soviets would encourage Moscow to apply pressure on Ethiopia to compromise in the Ogaden dispute. Such a hope is probably unrealistic; Siad once tried this strategy himself and found that the Soviets were unable to move Addis Ababa on this point. [redacted]

Other, less likely, possibilities are that Siad could be replaced by radically nationalist young Army officers or by a radical Islamic regime. Either would be likely to turn away from the present orientation to the

United States. Somalia is an overwhelmingly Islamic country, fundamentally dissatisfied with the status quo in East Africa. There is no strong radical Islamic movement in Somalia today, but Islam has played an important part in past Somali national movements such as the quixotic anti-British, -Italian, and -Ethiopian revolt at the turn of the century. Somalia's major opponent, Ethiopia, is ruled by a Marxist regime led by men with a Christian cultural heritage. It is possible, therefore, that a charismatic, radically nationalist, Islamic leader could emerge who would again seek to unite the nation by renewing the old ethnic crusade. [redacted]

Implications for the United States

Siad has been able to protect his position for 12 years, but Somalia's problems are now so grave that his position will remain weak even if he is able to hold on for the next year or more. This will make the Government of Somalia a fragile and troubled ally for the United States. Despite Siad's hopes, no US aid program on a scale currently being considered would solve enough of Somalia's problems to ensure political stability. [redacted]

Despite occasional and ambiguous signs of recovery, the Somali economy is narrowly based and will require long-term and substantial outside aid. The Somali military shows little prospect of recovering its former strength and will also need sustained foreign help. In an attempt to elicit this aid from the United States, Siad probably will intensify his current efforts to convince Washington of Somalia's strategic value as the state in the northwest Indian Ocean region most willing to permit extensive US use of its military facilities. [redacted]

The overthrow of Siad probably would result—at least initially—in the accession to power of similarly opportunistic military officers who would request substantial military and economic aid. In seeking such assistance, the new rulers would be acting on the belief that Siad's failure to obtain this aid was a central cause of his fall. Such pressure would intensify the current US dilemma of how to help the Somalis without alienating their neighbors, and would raise the possibility that a new regime would seek a rapprochement with the Soviets if US aid were not forthcoming. [redacted]

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